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ABSTRACT

This book focuses on what it takes to translate professional development into impressive learning gains for students. The experiences of eight award-winning schools are distilled into principles for success. This book is based on hundreds of hours of talking with teachers and administrators at the eight schools. The schools are diverse, representing a wide range of locations, sizes, and student characteristics. The schools' stories tell of students who achieve because their teachers are learners. At the heart of each school's success is an exemplary professional development program. After an introduction to the book and an overview of the eight schools, Section 1, "The Key: A Culture of Learning," discusses "Student-Centered Goals"; "An Expanded Definition of Professional Development"; "Ongoing, Job-Embedded Informal Learning"; "A Collaborative Environment"; "Time for Learning and Collaboration"; and "Checking for Results." Section 2, "A Boost from Outside," discusses "External Call to Action," "Partnerships with External Programs," and "Fiscal Resources." Section 3 offers "Implications for Site and District Leaders." The two appendixes include school profiles and information on the research study. (SM)

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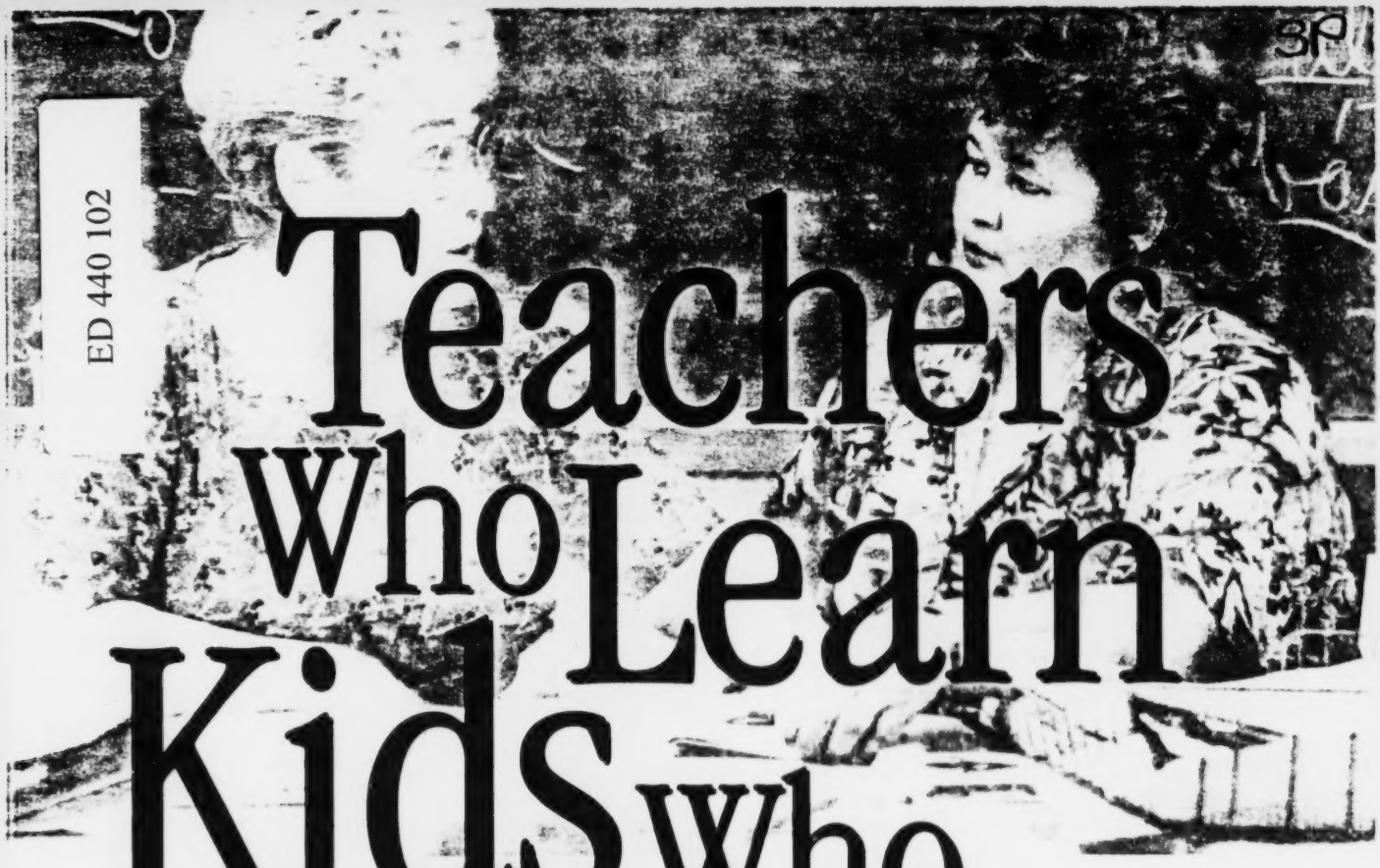

Teachers Who Learn Kids Who Achieve

A Look at Schools with Model Professional Development

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Teachers Who Learn Kids Who Achieve

A Look at Schools with Model Professional Development

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WestEd is a research, development, and service agency working with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. Drawing on the best knowledge from research and practice, we work with practitioners, policymakers, and others to address education's most critical issues. A nonprofit agency, WestEd, whose work extends internationally, serves as one of the nation's designated regional educational laboratories — originally created by Congress in 1966 — serving the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. With headquarters in San Francisco, WestEd has offices across the United States.

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Acknowledgments

The National Awards Program for Model Professional Development does more than acknowledge and celebrate exemplary efforts. It also provides a resource from which others can learn. As part of an effort to make the insights from these successful schools available to others, the U.S. Department of Education asked WestEd to examine the eight schools that won the award in the first two years of the competition, 1996-97 and 1997-98, and to tease out the factors leading to their success. (Several districts were also recognized, but their stories are beyond the scope of this study.)

To undertake this study on a rapid timeline, WestEd was fortunate to be able to subcontract with Joellen Killion and the National Staff Development Council. The long-term work of both Killion and the organization equipped them to learn quickly and to appreciate the extraordinary features of these schools. Working with a team of researchers from the two organizations, Killion orchestrated site visits, case reports, and cross-site analysis. The initial research report (accessible on WestEd's Web site: www.WestEd.org/WestEd/news.html/) provides the details of her thorough analysis of trends across the eight sites. The team of researchers included Ann Abeille, Vivian Elliott, Nancy Hurley, Treseen McCormick, Cindy McPherson, Renya Ramirez, Dolores Sandoval, and Susan Schiff.

Distilling the information from the research into the present document was the task of a set of writers and editors at WestEd. Thanks are due to the primary writers Jim Johnson and Lynn Murphy. Design assistance was provided by Max McConkey and the staff of Visual Strategies. The cover photos are the work of Nita Winter.

The identification of these schools as award winners would not have been possible without the continuing efforts of staff from the Regional Educational Laboratories who have worked with the U.S. Department of Education over the past several years to design and conduct the awards program. Laboratory staff also provided valuable input to this document.

The report that follows is based on hundreds of hours talking with teachers and administrators at these eight schools. We appreciate their graciousness in welcoming visitors into their schools in the closing weeks of the school year and their openness in sharing the stories behind their success.

Nikola N. Filby
Coordinator of the Regional Laboratory Program
WestEd
February 2000

Introduction

When a low-performing school turns around, what can we learn? In a district where one school has twice the achievement gains of comparable schools, what is going on? If a school is able to eliminate performance gaps between its white and non-white students, shouldn't we pay attention?

The eight schools represented in this report tell the story of students who achieve because their teachers are learners. Whether the school is in a rural community of Texas *colonias* or a privileged Georgia suburb, whether students have a transiency rate of 126 percent or a poverty rate of 88 percent, the culture of learning is palpable. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators have coalesced as learning communities and focused their own learning on what will translate into learning for students. Everyone is learning, and everyone benefits.

At the heart of each school's success is an exemplary professional development program — one we can profitably examine. How, exactly, did the staffs in these schools choose and maintain a focus, organize their time, and create a collaborative environment? And how did their professional development efforts interact with some of the conditions we already know are basic to successful school reform?

In this report you will find specifics, exactly which literacy program a Colorado school chose five years ago, for example. But our

Principles of Effective Professional Development

The mission of professional development is to prepare and support educators to help all students achieve to high standards of learning and development. When professional development is effective, a number of principles can be identified. In particular, it

- Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community;
- Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement;
- Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community;
- Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership;
- Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards;
- Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools;
- Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development;
- Requires substantial time and other resources;
- Is driven by a coherent long-term plan;
- Is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts.

focus is on more general conclusions, such as why that instructional program, or another one built around Navajo culture, or another one about math problem solving, or one about thinking skills have all been successful for anchoring professional development. We will help you analyze the role of programs like these in successful professional development. Likewise, if you want specific information about the implementation approaches in these schools — from Title I-funded coaching through voluntary Saturdays, it's here. But so too is an analysis of why a whole range of implementation strategies can work.

Finally, if you want to know what any of these analyses mean specifically for you, in your role as a principal, teacher, or district administrator, we have also organized our findings with your needs in mind. Our goal, after all, is to help you think about how *you* might apply the learnings from these schools to the professional development efforts you already have under way or are about to get started. What the schools in this report have accomplished is worthy of our attention not just because they have been successful, but because their models can help others to be so as well.

The awards program is based on a set of principles of effective professional development. They are enumerated on the facing page. (More information about the awards program itself can be found on page 4.)

These schools are worthy of our attention not just because they have been successful, but because their models can help others to be so as well.

National Awards Program for Model Professional Development

The National Awards Program for Model Professional Development honors schools (and districts) for their comprehensive efforts to increase teacher and student learning through professional development. But the awards program has another purpose as well. It promotes these successful efforts as models that others can learn from. As Secretary of Education Richard Riley explained in launching the program, "We need to do more to professionalize teaching. As we ask more and more of today's teachers, we must provide the necessary support to enable them to teach to high standards. High quality professional development is one critical component to meet this challenge."

HOW TO APPLY

When you think about what your own school has been able to accomplish for students, is there a story of successful professional development to tell? Are there clear relationships between teacher learning and measurable achievement for *all* students? Can you point to particular things that helped to shift the culture in your school to one that is relentless about learning – for students and for staff? Will other schools be able to apply your experience to their own?

To be considered for national recognition, applicants should be able to demonstrate that their program of professional development is a comprehensive model, for any grades from pre-K through 12, that exemplifies the Department of Education's Mission and Principles of Professional Development. In other words, award-winning programs will have professional growth as an integral part of school culture, address the needs of all students served, and promote professional development practices that ensure equity by being free of bias and accessible to all educators. Recognition under the awards program is based on how well applicants demonstrate that their professional development programs result in increased student learning.

Award applications and information about award winners are available online. Check the U.S. Department of Education's Web site for teachers:

www.ed.gov/inits/teachers/96-97/

www.ed.gov/inits/teachers/97-98/

The Eight Schools

While similar in their achievements, these eight award-winning schools represent a wide range of locations, sizes, and student characteristics. Whatever your particular school setting, aspects of one or more of these schools are likely to sound familiar. Perhaps the most salient thing suggested by these winners of the National Awards Program for Model Professional Development is that school demographics need not foreclose school success.

At the surface level, these exemplary schools are diverse. They are scattered across the country, from Roxbury, Massachusetts, to Manhattan, Kansas, to El Paso, Texas. Students range from kindergarten age to 21-year-olds. In some schools the vast majority of students are Latino; in others they are white, or African American, or Navajo. In one school fewer than 3 percent of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch, while in some others the percentage is over 80. The largest school runs year-round and has 860 students; the smallest schools serve fewer than 300 children.

As award recipients, however, these schools do share one easily discernable characteristic: their students have all made important academic gains. Teacher learning has paid off in measurable success for students. The table on page 8, "Overview of Eight Award-Winning Schools," provides a quick look at the most basic information about these schools, as well as at the ways each has measured success.

Below, each school is also introduced with a few broad strokes — snapshots to differentiate one school from another. (In Appendix A, profiles of the eight schools introduce each school and its distinctive professional development effort in more detail.)

Ganado Intermediate School is on a Navajo reservation in Ganado, Arizona. Most students are English language learners and receive free or reduced-price lunch. A professional development focus on literacy and Navajo language and culture has raised student test scores and, at the same time, narrowed the male-female achievement gap. Another success has been an increase in the number of Navajo teachers.

H.D. Hilley Elementary School sits just across the Texas border from Mexico, and the vast majority of its students are poor and Latino. Demographics might predict low student achievement, but at Hilley, impressive gains in state assessment scores led to the school's recognition as a 1997 Texas Successful School.

Hungerford School, P.S. 721R in Staten Island, serves a special education population of 12- to 21-year-olds. In focusing on how to increase students' independent functioning, Hungerford staff have been able to increase students' inclusion in general education classes, the achievement of goals in students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and the number of students placed in jobs.

International High School at LaGuardia Community College serves a student population made up of immigrants and English language learners. Students speak 37 different languages, but the staff has been able to narrow the achievement gap for students whose home language is not English, as well as increase students' attendance, graduation, and college acceptance rates.

Mason Elementary School, with an urban student population that is 71 percent African American, doubled its enrollment over a five-year period, moving from the 79th most-chosen to the 12th most-chosen school in its Boston district. Standardized test gains were almost double those districtwide after the first three years of a focused professional development effort.

Montview Elementary School has close to 900 students and a transciency rate of 126 percent. Professional development embedded in a schoolwide literacy program helped the staff take students' reading and math scores from below the district average to the top of the district range, while virtually eliminating the performance gap between white and non-white students.

Shallowford Falls Elementary School is a suburban school with almost no English language learners and almost no students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. Ninety percent of its students are white. With no demographic challenges, but dissatisfied with students' achievement, the staff plunged into the Georgia Pay for Performance program, becoming one of only ten schools in the state to receive a merit pay grant in 1994 and winning a second grant in 1998.

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School shares a pleasant college town with Kansas State University and has made the most of that proximity. When a new state math assessment left Wilson students in the dust, the staff involved the university and looked to professional development to turn things around. Starting out with a focus on math problem solving, and then adding literacy, they were able to increase student performance across the board.

Overview of Eight Award-Winning Schools

School	*Grades*	*Number of Students*	*Student Ethnicity*
Ganado Intermediate School *Ganado, Arizona*	3–5	515	99% Navajo
H.D. Hilley Elementary School *El Paso, Texas*	K–5	690	89% Latino 11% White 1% African American
Hungerford School, P.S. 721R *Staten Island, New York*	12 to 21 years old	250	59% White 20% African American 15% Latino 6% Asian
International High School at LaGuardia Community College *Long Island City, New York*	9–12	450	45% Latino 30% Asian 22% White 2% African American
Samuel W. Mason Elementary School *Roxbury, Massachusetts*	K–5	300	71% African American 14% White 11% Latino 2% Asian 2% Native American
Montview Elementary School *Aurora, Colorado*	K–5	860	46% Latino 27% African American 21% White 5% Asian 1% Native American
Shallowford Falls Elementary School *Marietta, Georgia*	K–5	660	90% White 3% African American 3% Latino 3% Asian
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School *Manhattan, Kansas*	K–6	320	80% White 15% African American 3% Asian 1% Latino 1% Native American

English Language Learners	*Free/Reduced Lunch*	*Special Needs*	*Measures of Success*
68%	88%	11%	• increased norm-referenced test scores • narrowed gender achievement gap • narrowed ELL achievement gap • increased number of Navajo teachers • increased parent participation
24%	70%	9%	• 1997 Texas Successful School • increased state assessment scores
14%	67%	100%	• more students use technology • increased job placements • more students achieve IEPs • more students included in general education
73%* ** 100% when admitted*	82%	0%	• increased graduation rates • increased attendance rates • increased college acceptance rates • narrowed ELL achievement gap
23%*	74%	26%	• doubled enrollment • went from 79th most-chosen to 12th most-chosen school in district • almost doubled districtwide test scores gains
42%	77%	13% 126%* **student transiency*	• increased reading and math scores from below district average to district high • virtually eliminated ethnicity performance gaps • selected as Literacy Learning Network demonstration site
0.5%	3%	15%	• steadily higher ITBS scores even with baseline scores above district average • selected as Talents Unlimited demonstration site
1%	44%	30%	• increased student performance in math • increased student performance in science • increased student performance in reading and language arts

The Key: A Culture of Learning

This whole process of staff development must be part of the culture and not something peripheral. That's why it's so effective.

— Teacher, Montview Elementary School

Teacher learning made a difference at these eight schools because it was part of a change in professional culture. The very nature of staff development shifted from isolated learning and the occasional workshop to focused, ongoing organizational learning built on collaborative reflection and joint action. This was the key finding from an extensive study of the eight schools.

The central importance of a professional community — a culture of learning — will be no surprise to those familiar with other educational research. It is increasingly clear that the skill-training model of professional development is not enough, even when the training is followed up with guided practice and coaching, long emphasized as neglected pieces of that model. Substantial progress is made only when teacher learning becomes embedded in the school day and the regular life of the school. (A list of resources on page 48 identifies some of the major writings in this area.)

The value of this study is not only to provide further evidence that a culture of learning is crucial, but also to provide concrete examples of what it means: What distinguishes a professional learning community? What does it look like? How did these eight schools get there?

As described in Appendix B, site teams visited each of the schools, interviewed teachers and administrators, and then described what they learned on in a number of ways. The study was guided by two broad questions:

- What teacher learning opportunities are available in these schools?
- How do teachers learn?

These questions led to others, as site visitors sought to understand how each school had made progress, from the perspectives not only of reform leaders but of "every teacher." Six broad lessons emerged, exemplified across the eight schools. They are listed in the box below and each is elaborated in the chapter sections that follow: "Student-Centered Goals," "An Expanded Definition of Professional Development," "Ongoing, Job-Embedded Informal Learning," "A Collaborative Environment," "Time for Learning and Collaboration," and "Checking for Results."

Lessons Learned

- Use clear, agreed-upon student achievement goals to focus and shape teacher learning.
- Provide an expanded array of professional development opportunities.
- Embed ongoing, informal learning into the school culture.
- Build a highly collaborative school environment where working together to solve problems and to learn from each other become cultural norms.
- Find and use the time to allow teacher learning to happen.
- Keep checking a broad range of student performance data.

Schoolwide professional development is aligned and embedded in the school improvement plan. Grade-level and individual professional development is also aligned with school goals and student needs. The latest fad or entertaining speaker has no place in the school.

— Teacher, Shallowford Falls Elementary School

Clear, student-centered goals have focused teacher learning in each of these schools. Each in its different way identified and translated important student needs into a plan for action, creating shared goals for raising achievement in every classroom and across grades. Such a plan becomes the driver and the yardstick for teacher growth. It channels learning, energy, and commitment; serves to screen and shape professional development activities; and becomes the gauge for teachers' progress and success.

Looking at this goal-building process across the eight schools, at how staff reached consensus around concrete, student-centered school improvement aims and chose instructional programs to foster them, several common points stand out.

First, these goals don't spring into being overnight. They grow out of an intensive, collaborative process of looking hard at where the school is now and how students are performing across the curriculum, and then deciding where the school wants to go. At each school visited, a student-focused planning process, usually linked to formal requirements, was in place before dramatic change became visible. At Woodrow Wilson, the Kansas Quality Performance Accreditation program requires an annual plan for improvement with specific student achievement goals. Similarly, at H.D. Hilley, the Texas Campus Improvement Plan establishes the expectations for continuous

Evolving Goals at Shallowford Falls Elementary

In 1990, when Shallowford Falls Elementary School was about to open its doors for the first time, the staff's single most important goal was to learn each other's names. Eight years later, when the school was recognized for having one of the most effective staff development programs in the country, staff members had learned a lot more than how to greet each other. But in that first overnight staff retreat, which has become a school tradition, they started with names and team building. They had to.

The focus for professional development in those first years came from the administration and reflected what the principal had told teachers when she hired them: "We will work as a team." Because this statement had relevance for school governance, not just staff attitudes, early professional development also took teachers through training in site-based management and decisionmaking.

Once Georgia instituted its Pay for Performance program, the principal asked teachers to consider taking part in it. That program's model of carefully documenting gains in student learning was one that resonated at Shallowford Falls. Aligning professional development with a fine-grained analysis of students' standardized test scores, within the framework of county goals and state standards, has become one of the school hallmarks.

Each year, the Building Leadership Team, which has representatives from each grade level, special education, specialist teachers, paraprofessionals, and other support staff, develops the School Improvement Plan. This team collects student data, talks with people whom they represent, and drafts a School Improvement Plan for consideration by the entire staff. Before the plan is voted on, everyone has seen it and given input several times. It is everyone's plan and everyone's responsibility.

One year, for example, they voted to embark on a three-year effort that would take the whole staff through the Frameworks literacy program – working in heterogeneous groups. "It was interesting for people to see how reading evolved across the grades and how to provide kids with consistency and continuity," one teacher recalls.

Literacy has continued to be a focus in subsequent years, along with Talents Unlimited, a program to improve students' critical and creative thinking skills in content areas. More recently, technology has become an additional focus, again linked to student learning goals.

A teacher who was a charter member of the Shallowford Falls faculty sums up how the school's professional development goals have changed over the years: "Our first school goals dealt with bonding and being a team. Nothing was very specific or academic. But we've evolved into very specific academic goals. Each year we grow in our ability to set goals."

These goals don't spring into being overnight.

growth. Hungerford's curriculum committees set standards for student performance that align with its district improvement plan. The Coordinating Council at International High School determines the focus of all faculty-run committees based on extensive teacher input. Everyone in these successful schools knows the goals and supports them. Then, with a clear sense of what results they want, all work together to achieve them.

Often the process started small, focusing initially on one or two specific areas, and then, with growing success, expanding to others. Teachers at Woodrow Wilson initially set out to improve their students' mathematical problem solving and ended by raising student performance not only in math but in science and writing, as well. Quite often, in fact, these award-winning schools focused early reform efforts on issues not at the heart of classroom practice — such as increasing parent involvement or improving staff relationships — only gradually shifting more directly to issues of teaching and learning. International High School staff point out that starting "small" was critical to their success. Smaller, they believe, means more control and flexibility, and rapid response to issues that arise. Begin with just one change, they suggest, perhaps starting with a teacher portfolio process, and then bring that to the student level. But do it thoroughly and deeply.

Using test results and student data to identify specific areas for improvement, these schools selected or designed interventions to help tackle them. Montview saw the need for more consistency in reading instruction across grade levels, and after a few teachers piloted a Literacy Learning Network program with remarkable success, the entire staff decided to implement it schoolwide.

"The principal asked us, 'What do you want for the students? What is your wish list?' Boy, did we brainstorm."

At Ganado Intermediate, student-centered goals were developed from the staff's vision of what they wanted for their students. As one teacher recalls:

> *A couple of months into the school year the principal asked us, 'What do you want for the students? What is your wish list?' Boy, did we brainstorm. We talked about what we hoped for and wanted down to the grade level. She had us project five years from the time we brainstormed. That's how we started.*

Focusing on language and literacy to raise student achievement, Ganado's five-year professional development plan included English as a Second Language, writing, Navajo culture and language, Collaborative Literature Intervention Program (CLIP), and technology.

In every case such choices are guided by student improvement goals. "There needs to be a vision," one teacher at Samuel Mason school explains:

> *And there needs to be a process for how you're going to achieve it. Once you can get through those things — and they are painful, working as unified as you possibly can with the understanding that sometimes you just have to live with it because it is what's best for the population at large — you develop an understanding of what everyone's doing and where we're going. And through this process we always go back and ask if this is what we want: Does it match the vision? Is it what we want for our children? And if you can answer yes to both of them, then you know it's something to look into.*

The process takes time. As student and teacher needs are continually assessed, as new ideas are tried out, the plans themselves may change. A good example of this incremental forward motion is the

What teachers learn is driven by student needs.

path of change at Shallowford Falls. The principal describes how the beginning year's goals were weak, focusing on such things as bonding as a staff and physical aspects of the school plant. The second and third years' goals targeted improving working relationships and self-esteem. Then the Georgia Department of Education offered an opportunity to apply for merit pay. Through this Pay for Performance program volunteer schools were required to identify rigorous goals tied to improving students' academic performance. Shallowford Falls teachers, now comfortable enough as a staff to challenge themselves with more significant goals, focused on literacy and, eventually, expanded that focus to include the entire instructional program. (For more details, see page 14, "Evolving Goals at Shallowford Elementary.")

In each of these professional development programs, what teachers learn is driven by student needs — across the whole school, at specific grade levels, and in individual classrooms. This sustained focus over time is also key to ensuring the follow-through and reinforcement that make professional learning pay off, and it provides an axial point around which an increasingly collaborative learning culture develops. The point to emphasize here is that in each of these schools, the improvement plan drives teacher learning. It's both compass and touchstone, preventing professional development from being peripheral, disconnected, or fragmentary, and making it serve established needs for instructional improvement. An H.D. Hilley teacher sums it up this way: "Before, it felt like everyone was doing his or her own thing. Now it feels like the whole school is pulling together, trying to meet the goals that we have all discussed and created together. It feels like learning is seeping out of the school walls!"

Professional Development Planning Tools

Several guidebooks and toolkits offer schools practical tips for working through the professional development planning process.

NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

Professional Development, Learning from the Best: A Toolkit for Schools and Districts Based on Model Professional Development Award Winners. Preview, download, or order a print copy of this 102-page resource. Includes sections on designing, implementing, and evaluating professional development.

www.ncrel.org/pd/

WESTED

Comprehensive School Reform: Research-Based Strategies to Achieve High Standards. This package includes two videotapes and a guidebook. The guidebook provides a coherent framework for planning schoolwide improvements aimed at helping every student meet challenging standards. The first videotape overviews the CSRD program; the other showcases several schools that have begun implementing schoolwide reform. The package is available for $59.

www.WestEd.org/

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

A key part of planning is having a real understanding of students and their needs. The School Change Collaborative of the Regional Educational Laboratories, in their project on Students as Partners in Self Study, is field testing a variety of tools to capture student perspectives.

www.nwrel.org/scpd/natspec/dataday.html/

SERVE

Achieving Your Vision of Professional Development: How to Assess Your Needs and Get What You Want: This in-depth guide has sections on developing a vision, planning, and investing in professional development, with many examples. A chapter on the national award-winning schools is also included.

www.serve.org/publications/improve.htm/

In our movement toward becoming a community of learners, P.S. 721 R encouraged all staff and parents to become "students" in the course of the daily activities of our school. As such, professional development is not separate from student instruction. It is an extension of learning throughout the school. Success for all students depends upon both the learning of the individual school employees and improvement of the capacity of the school to solve problems and renew itself.

— TEACHER, HUNGERFORD SCHOOL (P.S. 721 R)

Building the knowledge and skill necessary to carry out a school's improvement goals requires an array of professional development experiences. Teachers in all eight schools learn in a variety of ways, both formally and informally, from outside experts, building trainers, and from each other. All forms are necessary for continuous growth.

Formal learning is often the place schools start, in order to focus on specific content or to benefit from a well-established learning structure. But in our interviews, teachers repeatedly stressed that while formal training sets the stage, it's really through more informal modes that new ideas take root, spread, and become part of daily practice, and that the crucial habits of collegial sharing become ingrained.

As part of their improvement plans, all these schools have tapped outside expertise through traditional learning opportunities — workshops, district or school inservices, coursework, training sessions, and conferences. These usually involve a defined learning group, such as a team, department, or grade level, and have predetermined outcomes and prescribed learning processes, each designed and facilitated by an expert.

When school staff engage in training together, they come away with a shared set of ideas to try out and a common understanding of problems to grapple with as a team.

A four-day introduction to Literacy Learning Network, for example, gave Montview Elementary teachers the early tools they needed to begin whole-school implementation. As part of their plan to improve student literacy, teachers at Ganado Intermediate attended Northern Arizona Writing Project summer institutes. Samuel W. Mason teachers got extensive training in using Math Investigations and Early Literacy Learning Initiative (ELLI). Teachers at Woodrow Wilson attended workshops to gain more instructional strategies to teach problem solving in mathematics. Several schools had inservice technology courses. Teachers most appreciated on-site training designed to meet the specific needs of their school. These workshops were presented by outside consultants, district experts, and, occasionally, the school's teachers or principal.

Formal learning opportunities like these can strengthen teachers' content knowledge, introduce them to new instructional approaches, and explain the theories or principles underlying them. Moreover, these regularly scheduled sessions can also help get things moving. When school staff engage in training together, they come away with a shared set of ideas to try out and a common understanding of problems to grapple with as a team — and they discover all the while a natural focus for beginning a collaboration. Yet as comprehensive change efforts teach us, it's not enough to be exposed to new ideas, we have to know where they fit, and we have to become skilled in using them. These formal professional development structures can't ensure that the new knowledge will translate into strong classroom practice, that the skills will be honed in ways that lead to achievement of schoolwide goals.

The Knowledge Loom
Where Educators Craft Best Practice into Real World Success

rofessional development should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching.

Teachers learn from their work. Learning how to teach more effectively on the basis of experience requires that such learning be planned for and evaluated. Learning needs arise and should be met in real contexts. Curriculum development, assessment, and decision-making processes are all occasions for learning. When built into these routine practices, professional development powerfully addresses real needs."

This is one of eight characteristics of effective professional development identified in the Web-based resource called "The Knowledge Loom," developed by the LAB at Brown University. The Web site includes a growing collection of varied best-practices resources. Those focused on professional development are consistent with the lessons in this report. The initial collection of school stories are from these award-winning schools. More vignettes will be added over time. Check this Web site for more good ideas, or to add your own.

http://knowledgeloom.org/

Joellen Killion compares formal training to the first steps in constructing a house: gathering the materials, blueprints, and tools needed to build it. But assembling the plan, equipment, and supplies is only part of the construction process. Actually building the house requires applying these tools and materials in highly collaborative ways, working together to produce results that match the plan. But here, adapting the analogy to school improvement, it's a question of building on what you know, learning new techniques for house framing and roofing as you go. In other words, informal approaches expand professional development to include, as Michael Fullan says, "learning while doing and learning from doing."

Staff development is much, much more than 20 hours of required experiences. In fact, most of the staff development occurs informally, through asking for assistance from colleagues, sharing ideas, team meetings, attending conferences, or hearing what people learned from a particular speaker. The fourth Thursday of every month is always a staff development faculty meeting and those sessions usually incorporate new information and knowledge, practicing a skill or dialoguing within the team, or reviewing content learned previously.

— TEACHER, SHALLOWFORD FALLS

What teachers told us, repeatedly, is that the everyday work of schooling is, itself, an occasion for learning. Because teacher learning is so ingrained in their schools' culture, any opportunity for conversation can spontaneously turn into an occasion for learning. As one International High School teacher says, "Every conversation between two professionals is professional development. I think it's one of the main reasons this school has enjoyed so much success."

But this kind of professional culture developed only over time through the deliberate cultivation of collaborative structures at the school. Teachers participated in team meetings, grade-level meetings, and interdisciplinary curriculum development groups. They were part of study groups, action research groups, and dialogue sessions. In fact, the sheer number of different arrangements for teacher collaboration and conversation about teaching and learning was striking (see "Informal Learning Structures," page 23).

Some informal learning structures — important examples being peer and expert coaching — have traditionally been considered

Informal Learning Structures Identified by Teachers

- Analyzing student performance
- Attending content-area meetings
- Being observed by other teachers
- Coaching
- Conducting action research
- Conducting trial-and-error experiments
- Conversing with colleagues
- Creating student learning activities
- Creating teacher portfolios
- Designing curriculum
- Implementing new ideas
- Interacting with visiting professors
- Making decisions
- Mentoring
- Observing other teachers
- Observing students
- Organizing educational initiatives
- Participating in meetings
- Participating in self-studies
- Planning the budget
- Planning with grade-level team
- Reading articles and books
- Serving as a peer evaluator
- Serving on committees
- Serving on a leadership team
- Sharing from conferences
- Solving problems
- Studying student work
- Supervising a student teacher, intern, or teaching assistant
- Traveling
- Visiting other schools
- Watching videotapes
- Working on classroom, school, district, or community projects
- Working through conflicts
- Writing action plans
- Writing for professional publications
- Writing grants

follow-up. Occurring after a formal training experience, they help teachers take what they've learned so far and make it work in the classroom. Coaching, whether by fellow staff or outside consultants, helps teachers to reexamine what they have been taught, figure out how to integrate it into their current instructional and curricular

Coaching at Montview Elementary School*

Reviewing her schedule for Thursday, Renata sees that Julia, her teacher leader, will come in as usual for a weekly observation during her reading lesson. She reminds herself to review her action plan before their meeting and to make sure that Carol, the paraprofessional, has been scheduled to cover her classroom while she meets with Julia after the observation.

Renata remembers that initially she was concerned and very self-conscious about the coaching process; constructive feedback was sometimes hard for her to take. Working with Julia, though, Renata has found that while Julia is, herself, knowledgeable about reading, she lets Renata know that it's okay not to have all the answers, that, in fact, it's important to be able to ask questions.

When they meet to talk about a lesson, they focus on Renata's action plan – the one she made for herself – and talk about how it played out in the lesson. One thing they don't talk about is how to "fix" the lesson. Referring to specific things she observes, Julia often asks, "Why do you think that happened?" Sometimes they agree, sometimes they don't. But if they don't, they explore further, and that's when it's really the most fun.

Over the last few weeks, Renata has based her action plans on the kinds of questions she asks during reading group. The students, she felt, had not been taking responsibility for their learning. So during the lessons, Julia wrote down the questions Renata asked. As soon as she and Julia looked at the questions together, Renata realized she was doing way too much prompting. She was taking so much responsibility for the students' success that they didn't have to. Julia and Renata talked about what the questions would be like if she were to gradually release responsibility to the kids. Renata's questions during subsequent lessons started to change.

Julia also recommended some articles about questioning strategies that she and Renata could read and discuss. In fact, Renata had built one of those new strategies into the lesson Julia would see on Thursday....

* This vignette is constructed from the experiences of several Montview teachers.

unit, and gauge its effectiveness. In these schools, coaches often include peers, who are able to observe and help each other on a routine basis. Teachers see themselves participating in processes that allow one professional to help another learn and grow. (See page 24, "Coaching at Montview Elementary School.")

At these schools, informal learning has an additional significance. Because the thinking is not outside-in, informal structures like coaching are not seen as only one part of a more "comprehensive" training; instead, training is considered to be only one part of an ongoing process of teacher learning.

With this mindset in place, teachers can create opportunities for sharing and learning within their daily work. In the hall or lunchroom one teacher might mention to another, "I'm having trouble getting three of my students to finish editing their final writing project. You've gotten all your kids to finish. What strategies did you use?" Teachers talk over lunch about individual students, trade ideas about assessments in grade-level meetings, and discuss curriculum integration in cross-disciplinary teams. They serve on leadership teams, plan units of instruction, and share what works with each other. The power of this kind of learning is that it's practical and immediately relevant to what teachers do in their classrooms.

At the heart of many of these structures and processes is inquiry: disciplined study of what works in the local context. These teachers want to understand their students and how they learn. They ask questions and reflect on what is or isn't happening. They look to theory, research, and each other for promising practices to try out. They examine student work closely to analyze student learning and

At the heart of informal learning is inquiry. These teachers want to understand their students and how they learn.

get clues for improvement. They try things out and study the effects over time. Again, these inquiry processes have become embedded in how these schools operate. But the schools have also used some explicit structures such as teacher study groups or teacher research projects. (See page 27, "Action Research at Wilson Elementary School," for the story of how one school staff incorporated action research to investigate and improve their practices in mathematics instruction.)

> *If there are four of you moving a piano up a staircase, you're going to work together, because you're jointly responsible for that piano. But if you were each taking a box of books upstairs, you wouldn't have to work together. So the principal has set up a school, and though there were a lot of other people involved, in some fundamental way he has made it possible for us to have a school where we're lugging a piano up the stairs together. We're so interdependent — it's in our best interest to work together.*
>
> — TEACHER, INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

The kind of powerful collaborative learning these teachers describe doesn't just happen. In fact, traditional school organization works against it, walling teachers off from one another. "Almost everything about school," Linda Darling-Hammond and Milbrey McLaughlin observe, "is oriented toward going it alone professionally. Few schools are structured to allow teachers to think in terms of shared problems and broader organizational goals." All eight of these schools found ways to reverse this model, to break down the walls. Through explicit expectations and deliberate structuring, each built over time a supportive community of practice.

Action Research at Wilson Elementary School*

"We started an action-research project in 1995," explains Francie, a lead math teacher. "We had been getting math scores from the state since 1993, and Woodrow Wilson's scores were the lowest in the district. It was really embarrassing. When three of us signed up for an action-research class at Kansas State University, we saw it as an opportunity to deal with our students' problem-solving skills. We thought that if all our teachers, grades K-6, were knowledgeable about what students are expected to know on the assessment [which is given in grade 4] and were trained in the techniques for teaching and assessing open-ended math problems, the students would score higher over time.

"So we presented our proposal to the faculty. Not everyone was 100 percent behind the project, but they participated. First we got together and, looking at the state math assessment scores, we asked one another, 'What are we missing here?'"

Kit, who teaches fourth grade, reports what a revelation it was simply to take a hard look at the test. "We almost cried when we saw the exam. We were used to basic math, mostly a numbers test. We were comfortable with that type of test because that's what we were used to teaching. The new test had lots of reading and no two problems were alike. They had big blank areas, and now you had to explain your answer in words. Our kids couldn't do it, and we, as teachers, couldn't do it either. We were very frustrated. We didn't know how we were going to teach these concepts. We knew we needed help, and not just in fourth grade. We needed to have teachers teaching kids these kinds of problems from the beginning – in the earlier grades. We decided to make the whole school responsible, not just the fourth-grade teachers."

Francie continues, "It made a big difference in everyone's attitude to share the load. That's when we started to get together as a faculty. We were using the same language, and we all started to talk about our expectations. Everyone came together around the goals."

"We learned by doing it," Kit adds, "practicing and working out the problems together. All of our teachers started by using open-ended questions and grading them the same way the state grades them. We would make up problems and think about how to teach our students to solve problems. There was a good book we used to learn about how to teach problem solving, and we would take their problems and change words to get the kids' attention. We also had a lot of manipulatives, and teachers would get together and play with them. We kept practicing, and each year we got better."

To answer their action-research question definitively, Francie and her colleagues analyzed the student test scores on the Kansas Mathematics Assessment over a two-year period. Their findings corroborated their informal observations: student achievement had improved.

* This vignette is constructed from interviews with several Wilson teachers.

Each interview for this study told a story of a school built on collaboration.

While we have seen how these schools support collaborative professional learning, this central work is supported by broader shared ownership and governance of the school as a whole. Teachers work in horizontal, vertical, grade-level, or interdisciplinary teams; they serve on committees such as budget, school leadership, "campus improvement," or "test utilization"; and they participate on any number of task forces. Mason Elementary, for example, has a Student Support Team, School-Based Management Team, Instructional Leadership Team, and weekly grade-level team sessions in which teachers examine student work and look at the effects of new strategies they're trying in writing and math.

Teachers at H.D. Hilley meet weekly in horizontal grade-level teams and monthly in vertical subject-area teams that coordinate curriculum and schoolwide initiatives. Hungerford's school-based management team, which includes parents, teachers, and students, is, itself, a learning community that strives to increase students' academic success, social skills, and independent functioning. Teachers at Woodrow Wilson serve on their school's Quality Performance Accreditation committees and help shape school goals, professional development, and curricular improvements. In the same way, Montview teachers serve on a variety of committees, helping make decisions about curriculum, school resources, and new programs.

Today, shared governance is a routine practice at each of the model schools. Having a real voice in the decisions that affect them most strengthens teachers' ownership of and commitment to the change efforts. At International, a well-structured Coordinating Council handles operational and management decisions for the school. "Any major decisions are by consensus," reports one teacher:

If there is resistance — and there almost always is — people stop to ask, "How can we change it so you can live with it?" Nothing comes from the top down. New ideas or strategies are tried out by experimental teams so that buy-in from everyone is gradual and influenced by proven success. Teams and individuals are free to adapt and adjust changes to meet their own specific needs. The atmosphere here is open and trusting. Teachers are free to observe, coach, and mentor each other both individually and in team format. Their opinions are asked for and they feel valuable. They can agree or disagree, challenge and confront, take risks and make mistakes. A non-judgmental focus on the positive allows for this level of trust.

"School performance goals are not attained through the practices of individual teachers but through what our faculty does as a whole."

As schools build collaborative cultures in these ways, everyone comes to understand what it means to say, as one teacher does, that "School performance goals are not attained through the practices of individual teachers, but through what our faculty does as a whole." Each interview for this study told similar stories of a school built on collaboration. A "jigsaw puzzle," an H.D. Hilley teacher terms it, "where each teacher plays a role that, put together, creates magic."

What does a collegial environment look like? A teacher at Shallowford Falls offers this glimpse:

There is no competition, no superstars, because everyone is a star teacher. Everyone helps everyone else. Teachers teach for each other, share all ideas and strategies, give advice, listen, and mentor new people. It makes no difference what your role, support is always available. There are no boundaries when we work together. Everyone depends on each other. Some of the most effective staff development is what is learned from colleagues by just asking for help.

"That's what keeps the calmness, because everyone knows they can have their say."

The "jigsaw puzzle" mentioned earlier at Hilley is facilitated by a principal whose leadership style is to share constantly in support of a mutual vision. "This vision," one teacher explains, "started from the top and went to the bottom and then cycled back to the top in such a way that everyone was motivated to open her classroom door." A teacher at International stresses that "The voices of teachers are heard here. We feel free to offer our own ideas. And not only that — our ideas and opinions are asked for. We feel valued." A Ganado teacher concurs:

> *I think the calmness here comes from the fact that when the district went to site management, every other school had a management team. Not this school — our whole school is the team. All of us meet and talk. All of our voices are heard. That's what keeps the calmness, because everyone knows they can have their say. When decisions are made, there's buy-in because they've been heard.*

This respect for the contributions of individuals to the whole extends beyond participation in group decisions to recognition that teachers need individuality and choice in the classroom as well. While all of these schools chose some common programs to adopt, they did not interpret this to mean precise uniformity in instruction. At Montview, one teacher explains, "Even when the entire staff agrees on specific programs or techniques, individual teachers can exercise their choice in the implementation. Perhaps the success of the program lies there — in choice." Referring to individuality within group responsibility, another Montview teacher says:

> *If something is not working for a child, then it's up to the teacher to make sure it does, and use something different if necessary. At Montview, we don't just*

implement strategies we teach children. It's important to show how it all fits in the school's goals and values along with the state standards — good, solid instruction within the parameters that have been established is the premium. As a result, teachers are not clones of each other, yet no one is out on the fringes, and there's consistency from grade level to grade level.

"The principal has to be a learner, just like every single teacher."

This interweaving of group and individual choice and accountability is often manifested in planning at multiple levels. Not only do these folks have school plans, they also have plans for teams, grade levels, or other subgroups. And, often, individual teachers write improvement plans for themselves. At Montview Elementary, for example, teachers write personal action plans that become the focus of their coaching sessions with teacher leaders. At International High School, individual core-teaching teams establish their own goals for the year as well as develop their own agendas for their meetings.

The learning community also extends beyond the teaching faculty. The principals in these schools model learning and take an active part in teacher professional development. As a Montview teacher comments, "The principal has to be a learner, just like every single teacher." In addition to participating in leadership development opportunities, these principals attend workshops and talk with the teachers about what they all are learning.

Parents, too, become part of the learning community. At H.D. Hilley, for example, parents learned technology with and from students and teachers. (See page 34, "A Place for Parents at Hilley Elementary School.")

Sometimes we were given planning time, and we were able to get more done in a couple of hours than we thought we could. There were also some staff development days, but the majority of it was after school. It was really hard to learn new things at the end of the day because we were all so tired.

— Teacher, Woodrow Wilson

School improvement, as Fullan stresses, is about time — making time, taking time, finding more meaningful ways to spend time. Just as traditional school organization isolates teachers, so, too, is it stingy with time for working and learning together. "Caught in the crunch of inflexible time," in Phillip Schlechty's phrase, teachers and administrators feel they have little control over the way time is allocated in school. It is also one commodity — more precious even than money — that they do not have enough of: time to teach, to converse, to review student work, to develop rubrics, to create curriculum, to revise programs and policies, to know what happens in other classrooms. Many perceive time as the biggest barrier to school change. For these reasons, rethinking and restructuring time is central to building a learning culture.

Through a combination of creative planning and everyone pulling together, these award-winning schools demonstrated that they could find time to do what was needed, time both inside and outside the school day. A teacher at International High School describes the importance of teachers' scheduled time together as well the pervasiveness of on-the-fly professional conversations and learning:

Teachers' schedules are creatively arranged so that we meet — and meet often. Though the important

conversations take place everywhere, from formal committees to shared rides home, putting meeting time into teachers' schedules ensures that the talking will occur.

Job-embedded coaching is possible because Title I funds are used to create time.

Schools make teachers' protected meeting and planning time available in several ways. They restructure available professional development and traditional meeting time to make it serve their goals. In some cases, they reschedule student learning time to provide extended periods for teachers to work together. Some schools use support personnel, such as substitutes, teacher assistants, student teachers, or interns, to release teachers from their classrooms so they can take part in professional development experiences. At Montview, job-embedded coaching is made possible because of the way Title I funds are used to create time — paying for classroom coverage so teachers can meet weekly with a coach, and paying for the coach position itself. (See page 24, "Coaching at Montview Elementary School.")

Faculty meetings and professional development days are restructured to get the most out of them. Rather than squandering faculty meetings on routine information that can be communicated through newsletters or e-mail, principals and teachers use this time to focus collaboratively on the "real work" of teaching. There are no more one-shot "topic du jour" presentations on inservice days, unless required by the district. In fact, there are no longer routine faculty meetings at Shallowford Falls, International High School, Montview, Hungerford, or Wilson. "We don't have faculty meetings," says a Woodrow Wilson teacher. "We're doing inservices when we get together as a staff. It's not like the day-to-day list of agenda items; you're just only talking about math."

A Place for Parents at Hilley Elementary School

When teachers at H.D. Hilley wrote the school mission statement, they specifically recognized the important role of parents as participants in the education of their children. However, because many Hilley parents are native Spanish-speakers, teachers were concerned that language barriers would discourage their participation in the life of the school.

A Challenge Grant for Technology Innovation from the U.S. Department of Education has been an important resource at Hilley for getting parents into the school and more directly involved with their children's learning. The grant funding supports new technology for classrooms, students, and parents. Hilley's on-campus Parent Center is funded by the grant and provides a place where parents can learn about technology, check out computers for use at home, and also attend adult basic education and parenting classes.

The center has become a place where teachers, students, and parents come together in a "circle of learning." For example, a resource teacher who leads the parenting classes reports, "The classes are a learning tool for me. At the same time that I am teaching the parents, I learn from them about their children – how they learn and what might help them succeed."

Another teacher, who has taught his students to tutor parents in the use of the center's computers, is proud of everyone's success: "I encourage the children to work with the parents the way I have worked with them. They are effective teachers because they can say, 'When I began, I didn't know anything, either.' We all start this as blank slates."

Best of all, as another teacher points out, "When parents are in the Parent Center, they are accessible – to the kids and to the staff."

Rescheduling the school day can free up extended blocks of time for teachers to engage in collaboration and planning. Ganado Intermediate grouped music, art, and physical education together, giving teachers a three-hour block of uninterrupted time weekly to plan with grade-level colleagues. At International High School, core-team planning time is used for professional development that teachers design themselves. At Mason, the school day starts late; teachers can get together for professional development before they meet their classes. The work other schools do in study teams, action

Faculty meetings are not squandered on routine information.

research teams, and coaching sessions with teacher leaders is all made to fit into the school day. A few schools also use early-release days to provide teachers a one- to two-hour block of time for professional development one afternoon each week or month.

Teachers at each of these schools volunteer a tremendous amount of personal time, beyond the conventional workday, for professional development. This learning time occurs after school, before school, on weekends, and in the summer. Most of these teachers contribute one to seven hours of their own time per week for professional development.

Local universities offer classes at Ganado Intermediate's facility after school and also in summer. At Hungerford, teachers take part in a popular ritual — periodic Saturday professional development sessions, for which the teachers themselves determine the content. While these unique sessions are voluntary, attendance steadily increases each year. At Shallowford Falls, Ganado Intermediate, Hilley, and Montview, teachers choose to participate in after-school professional development programs available through their districts.

With stubborn resolve and ingenuity, every school creates or sets aside the time needed for staff to plan programs, exchange ideas, and reflect together about instruction, student needs, and teacher growth. This vital resource of time is indispensable for all aspects of the culture shift we've examined so far.

Improved job performance, changes in school organization and routines, and improved student learning are concrete indicators of the effectiveness of our professional development. Our professional development has been directed at reforming our school and improving performance of students and staff.

— TEACHER, HUNGERFORD

Perhaps the toughest challenge in schoolwide improvement is keeping the organizational eye fixed squarely on the prize. Change efforts often peter out or become sidetracked because schools are not relentless about staying the course, about sustaining momentum, about keeping their commitment alive and focused on the concrete student performance goals they set out to achieve.

Each of the these schools continually reviews programs and instructional strategies, keeping some, modifying others, discarding those that aren't working — but basing these decisions on student results, not teacher preferences. They constantly evaluate the school's professional development by one ultimate criterion: What effect is it having on kids?

In this era of accountability, such a focus on results is increasingly mandated. These schools, certainly, participate in local and state accountability programs. But for them, accountability is not just an end-of-year external requirement, it is fundamental part of the way they think about their work. As we have seen in the section on goal setting, and throughout this report, these schools focus closely on students in all they do. So for them, feedback and evaluation are ongoing.

Staying focused on results sometimes means being willing to rethink and revise.

Teachers are comfortable with multiple types of data, know how to interpret assessment results, and use available data about their students. Hungerford staff members constantly evaluate their students' progress on their IEPs. Samuel W. Mason teachers review student performance monthly, using various assessment methods. At Montview, teachers conduct in-depth quarterly assessments of their students' literacy skills. Most of these schools maintain an ongoing system of student assessment, allowing them to intervene quickly and appropriately. Frequent analysis and discussion of student work and progress — and the open nature of the professional development — enable these staffs to make mid-course corrections.

End-of-year progress reports allow school staffs to review their accomplishments and plan for the year ahead. Staying focused on results sometimes means being willing to rethink and revise. "Although solid in its design," Mason's principal says, "our professional development is far from a packaged solution. It demands continual reinvention and redirection as the Professional Development Team discovers more appropriate designs."

Just as professional development planning goes on at several levels — schoolwide, in teams, and individually — so does the stocktaking. Cross-grade teams at Shallowford Falls form goals for the school every spring based on student assessment data. Grade-level teams are given two hours of released time three times a year to develop and assess specific team goals. Each teacher also has an annual conference with the principal to discuss student achievement gains over the course of the year and achievement of individual professional development goals. As one Shallowford Falls teacher explains:

"Change is the most difficult thing — it's slow and you can lose faith — but the principal did a good job of keeping us unified."

> *The measure of success for staff development experiences is that students show increased scores or measurable progress on designated assessments. Teachers are accountable to show how they are using their professional learning, what they've done, and how it has made a difference for their class, their grade level, the school.*

At International High School teachers participate in peer evaluation, observe each other, and develop an extensive portfolio to document progress on their professional development goals. Teachers at Montview develop action plans, which they review with teacher leaders; assessing progress is a shared responsibility.

Leadership is essential, especially through the periods of difficulty that are bound to arise. Things don't always work out as intended. Even research-based programs don't necessarily work as well or as smoothly in one site as in another. New strategies need to be tried, momentum has to be maintained, and the principal almost always plays a central role. Staff at Montview, for example, describe their principal as a leader with a vision, or as one teacher puts it:

> *She keeps us on the same page, going in the same direction. And because she's always working on something new, the principal models her high expectations for teacher learning.*

A teacher at Mason describes her principal's efforts to keep everyone motivated and on target: "Change is the most difficult thing — it's slow, and you can lose faith — but the principal did a good job of keeping us unified. She made sure she patted us on the back and told us we were doing a good job, letting us know it will work in time, things will change — and we had to really believe that. She really kept that momentum alive."

A Boost from Outside

These schools are a triumph of the human spirit. Mostly, they succeed through their own caring and persistence. But they also benefit from help outside the school in two significant areas: pressure and support.

It can be hard to step back from familiar routines and realize that business as usual is just not enough. Each of the eight schools in this study was spurred into greater action by a force outside of itself. In some schools, low enrollment that threatened closure was the wake-up call. For others, the appearance in local newspapers of students' state test scores sent a very public message about the school's performance. As a Wilson Elementary teacher put it, "When the state tests started to appear, that really got our attention. We're up to snuff now. That has been driving a lot of changes here." In some cases, a new principal brought higher expectations and a plan for reform. And in some of these schools a university partnership initiated a review of student performance that told a disturbing story.

External accountability measures hold schools responsible for meeting set performance standards for *all* students. In a number of model schools, these measures have caused teachers to think differently about students' capabilities. This is especially true for those teaching students with special needs. These students now have

These teachers accept responsibility for their students rather than make excuses.

more opportunities for learning because they are fully included in the classrooms or receive instruction that accommodates their needs. Their performance is now studied in light of the performance of other students. Other children who learn differently also benefit from public accountability measures. Teachers at these award-winning schools understand the unique needs of their students and are motivated to devise and adapt strategies to address them. In the words of one Mason teacher, "Now I can teach any student you give me."

What is striking about the teachers at these sites is that they accept responsibility for their students' results rather than make excuses for the results. This is a fundamental step in making change at any school.

Change really is hard. Partnerships with local universities, research-based programs, and reform networks can provide moral support, as well as material help. In these award-winning schools, help was available in some form of powerful partnership.

Ganado Intermediate, for example, has several local colleges and universities as partners. University faculty members teach on-site classes, visit the school, and serve as coaches. As a member of the rural schools network of the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College in Vermont and the Northern Arizona Writing Project, Ganado has opportunities to receive training and send teachers to conferences and summer institutes. The school also participates in a Spencer Foundation grant to promote action research among rural teachers.

H.D. Hilley is a part of the Urban Systemic Initiative (USI) in its school district. The USI provides mentors to coach teachers and

Partnerships can provide moral support, as well as material help.

offers a number of workshops and training sessions for teachers in math and science. A long-term association with the University of Texas at El Paso provides research, support, and guidance about change. Several teachers at H.D. Hilley commented that their association with the university provided the fuel for change.

International High School is a member of the Annenberg New York Network for School Renewal. The collaborative gives staff members access to resources and support from other schools in the network. Several other international high schools in the New York City district are modeled after International and create a network for collaboration and inservice of teachers working with similar students and curriculum.

Samuel E. Mason Elementary maintains a number of supportive alliances. Their partnership with the John Hancock Corporation led to training in quality management in the early stages of their reform efforts. They also have partnerships with the Accelerated Schools network and City Year Youth Team, a group of young adults who help in the school. Several local colleges and universities provide other resources and expertise, from placing preservice teachers at Mason to supporting the implementation of literacy and math programs with courses and coaches.

Hungerford is part of Project Arts, a community program to bring theater and dance opportunities into the school. A few teachers, through their personal association with community groups, bring additional resources into the school to enhance their curricular areas. Teachers also tap community-based service providers to seek extra assistance and support for their special needs students.

Across the set of eight schools, teaming up with local university and college faculty brings a variety of course offerings, adds support

External Programs

number of resources are available to help schools develop partnerships and locate research-based programs that can provide significant external assistance.

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM

A Guide to Promising Practices in Educational Partnerships. Based on a national study of educational partnerships, this 63-page guide includes examples of needs assessments and strategies for staffing, staff development, community involvement, and more. Available online or from WestEd.

ed.gov/pubs/prompract/index.html/

NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Results-Based Staff Development for the Middle Grades. Twenty-six content-specific professional development programs for the middle grades are profiled online. The report can also be downloaded.

www.nsdc.org/educatorindex.htm/

NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE FOR COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM

On-line services include a database of school reform research literature, funding and conference announcements, and a quarterly newsletter.

www.goodschools.gwu.edu/

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

Catalog of School Reform Models. Schoolwide and content-based reform models are catalogued for on-line reading or downloading. Each model is described in terms of its origin, general description, results, implementation assistance, costs, student populations, special considerations, and selected evaluations.

www.nrel.org/scpd/natspec/catalog/

teachers, and introduces current research and information about teaching and content areas. Associations with local businesses and national networks offer these schools new perspectives, a wealth of new ideas, and access to new information. Each partnership provides expertise and access to additional opportunities for learning.

These schools are creative in locating funds to pursue their goals.

The partnerships mentioned above bring significant resources to the school: people, ideas, and concrete assistance. There's no question but that it costs money to provide people's time or material goods, or that developing and implementing ideas is expensive. Some of these partnerships are supported through state, federal, or foundation grants. Hilley, for example, benefits from mentor teachers provided via an Urban Systemic Initiative grant to the district from the National Science Foundation.

These schools draw from a wide range of funding sources for other aspects of their programs as well. They volunteer for opportunities that come up through the state or district. They seek out grants. Teachers at Hungerford wrote grants for school-based management and later sought funds to expand their innovative hydroponics unit into a three-school Web site. Several schools have technology grants. Guided by their goals for students and their improvement plans, they are creative in locating funds to pursue their goals.

But not all they do requires extensive outside funding. Some school-university partnerships are supported by the reallocation, through joint planning, of existing institutional resources of each partner — rethinking roles and relationships, not necessarily finding more money. Taking advantage of its location on the LaGuardia

Several schools arrange with local universities to host their preservice teachers, thereby expanding their professional learning community.

Community College campus, International High School shares more than facilities and resources with the college. College and high school faculty exchange some teaching assignments, and college faculty participate with the interdisciplinary teams to align high school instruction with college entry requirements. Several of the schools arrange with local universities to host their preservice teachers, thereby expanding their professional learning community.

Targeted school and district resources play their part, too. Schools have funds set aside to support teachers' attendance at off-site conferences and workshops, and although the processes for requesting these funds may differ from school to school, most teachers know that their requests are welcome if they align with school goals or their individual professional development plans. Principals and school leadership teams see that their role is to ensure adequate funding and to creatively allocate the budget to support teacher learning.

Implications for Site and District Leaders

School site leaders — both principals and teachers — played a vital role in moving these schools forward. While the lessons from these schools speak to many audiences, they are perhaps clearest for those looking to play a leadership role in their own schools. This final section draws a succinct set of actions to consider from the themes and school stories that run throughout this report.

In seven of the eight schools, the principal was a visionary leader. From cheerleading to coaching to fundraising, these principals set high expectations and provided support. They created the conditions for success, and they modeled the importance of learning in their own behavior. They also shared leadership with others on the staff, as illustrated in the section on collaborative environment. At Wilson, the primary leadership came from a core group of teachers, who initiated the math project and maintained momentum through a succession of principals. Strong leadership is critical, but it can come from a variety of sources.

The school district was not a major player in these success stories. These schools operated fairly independently from their districts. Districts provided standards and curriculum guides; they offered credit, funds, or actual opportunities to attend professional development workshops; but they were not very actively involved. In fact, several schools wished that their districts would take a more active

What Site and District Leaders Can Do

	Teachers and Principals	District Administrators
Student Data	Look at student data.	Provide data.
	Identify strengths and areas of need.	Assist with analysis and interpretation.
Partnerships	Use external programs and partnerships to provide new ideas in areas of focus.	Help schools find external service providers and make good choices that match the school's needs.
Embedded Learning	Bring extended teacher learning opportunities and applications of new ideas into the school building.	Expand definitions of professional development.
		Find and share examples of new approaches.
	Create expectations that all will be involved in continuous professional learning related to grade-level content, and provide support for this to happen.	Consider district staff as coaches.
	Use principles of high-quality professional development in designing school activities.	Support the conditions that foster collaborative learning; communicate with parents and community members about what is happening and why.
	Talk to each other about teaching and learning.	
Time for Collaboration	Find time for teachers to talk and work together.	Allow alternative schedules.
		Avoid conflicting district requirements on teachers' time.
Staffing	Expect everyone to be involved.	Assign staff to schools so as to build unity and consistency.
		Keep key personnel in place.
		Allow teachers to move out if they want.
Choice & Accountability	Allow individualization, but keep the focus on what's working for kids.	Require site plans to focus on student needs and take into account district goals and state standards.
	Build in multiple levels of choice and accountability – school plans, grade level or team plans, individual plans.	Develop evaluation systems that are consistent with and reinforce school/individual plans.

role in promoting and supporting reform. They would like to be tapped as resources to help other schools achieve similar success.

To move from isolated examples of success — "islands of hope" as Killion terms them — to more widespread improvement, the district role becomes more important. District policies, resources, and support strategies can all help build school capacity. One way to identify more specific implications for the district's role is to map backward from the conditions we have identified in these award-winning schools. Thus, the table on page 46 suggests critical actions for both site leadership and district administrators. If school sites need to look at student data, for example, analyzing with a variety of measures what students can and cannot do, then the district's role is to help them get the data they need in a timely way and assist with analysis and interpretation. If professional development embedded in the work of the school is critical to success, then the district can help to identify, communicate, and support structures for that learning.

We hope that the suggested actions in the table, the more detailed descriptions throughout this report, and the examples of the schools themselves can inspire and guide others to follow in their footsteps.

If professional development embedded in the work of the school is critical to success, then the district can help to identify, communicate, and support structures for that learning.

Related Reading

Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. (1995). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76 (8), 597-604.

Outlines policy approaches consistent with goals held for teacher learning and changes in practice.

Darling-Hammond, L. & Sykes, G. (Eds.) (1999). *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Collects chapters by major authors on all aspects of supporting learning throughout a teacher's career.

Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform.* London: Falmer Press.

Lays out eight basic lessons comprising a new mindset for contending with the dynamic, non-linear nature of real school change.

Lieberman, A. (1995). Practices that support teacher development: Transforming conceptions of professional learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76 (8), 591-596.

Presents a broad array of strategies to support teacher learning beyond traditional professional development.

Little, J. (1999). Organizing schools for teacher learning. In Darling-Hammond, L. & Sykes, G. (Eds.) *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Summarizes key factors and gives examples of how schools support deep teacher learning.

Loucks-Horsley, S., Hewson, P., Love, N., & Stiles, K. (1998). *Designing professional development for teachers of science and mathematics.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Provides a framework for planning and includes in-depth descriptions of many different approaches to professional development.

Newmann, F. & Associates. (1996). *Authentic achievement: Restructuring schools for intellectual quality.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Reports on research documenting the school factors associated with student learning, including the importance of teacher professional community.

Schlechty, P. (1990). *Schools for the 21st century: Leadership imperatives for educational reform.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Approaches reform by re-examining the structure and fundamental purposes of our schools – why they are the way they are – and offers an adaptable framework for comprehensive change.

Appendix A School Profiles

Ganado Intermediate School

P.O. Box 1757
Ganado, AZ 86505
520-755-1120

Grades: 3-5

Number of Students: 515

Student Ethnicity:
99% Navajo

English Language Learners: 68%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 88%

Special Needs: 11%

Measures of Success:
- increased norm-referenced test scores
- narrowed gender achievement gap
- narrowed ELL achievement gap
- increased number of Navajo teachers
- increased parent participation

"Teachers could see a connection between what they had learned and what they were doing."

Ganado Intermediate School sits in an isolated valley on the Navajo Reservation, 30 miles west of Window Rock, Arizona. Clustered around the school are several teacher residences and two of the other three schools that make up the remote Ganado district. Almost 100 percent of the students are Navajo. Diné is their native language, and 68 percent of Ganado Intermediate School's third, fourth, and fifth graders are classified as Limited-English Proficient. For years, the Ganado students consistently scored in the lowest quartile on the state-mandated, norm-referenced tests.

Concerned for their students and energized by a new principal, the staff decided to take action. One teacher explains, "As a Navajo teacher, you feel very motivated. You know where your students are at, and you know where they need to go to have a good head start."

When Susan Stropko became principal, she had already been in the Ganado district for several years, all of them focused on supporting the district's teachers to participate in the state's professional development Career Ladder program. She was a true believer in professional development and she was knowledgeable about it. But in her initial months as principal, some other concerns came first. As she explains: " Teachers had me working hard on correcting things — there were problems in the lunch room, no soap in the bathrooms.... But by Christmas their list was getting

shorter and shorter, so that by February, we were ready to say, 'What's the next step in getting this school to be the best in the state?'"

Led by the principal, teachers created a vision and a five-year plan for the school, to which they tied their own personal learning goals.

Many teachers left when they realized how determined their colleagues were to create real change. The teachers who stayed and those who chose to come to Ganado Intermediate found that while many resources, such as ESL classes and other university courses, were already available on site through Career Ladder, many more were needed if they were to address the goals they were setting for their students' learning.

Among the learning opportunities brought in to address teacher-identified needs were CLIP (Collaborative Literature Intervention Project), Northern Arizona Writing Project, a Spencer Foundation project on teacher inquiry, Foundations of Learning (Navajo culture and philosophy of education), and Integrated Thematic Instruction.

The district was generous in providing on-site, free coursework and giving teachers credit for it on the pay scale. The principal both nudged and encouraged teachers and teaching assistants to participate in these learning opportunities. And the staff appreciated these resources. "I've never been in a district with so many professional development opportunities," more than one teacher notes.

Nonetheless, teachers recognized that just taking courses was not enough. They wanted time together, to talk about what they were learning and to see how it was playing out with their students. So the school schedule was reconfigured with "allied" subjects like art and physical education grouped for each grade. This gave grade-level teams a solid block of time to meet every week to focus on student learning — to assess their students' work and progress and to determine what they, as teachers, needed to do or learn to become more effective with their kids.

The result, as the principal reports, was that "I could ask teachers what they were doing with a particular child and they could trace back to what had influenced them and see a connection between what they had learned and what they were doing."

In addition to grade-level meetings, Ganado Intermediate staff met every other week as a whole group — teachers, administrators, part-time teacher helpers, and teaching assistants. Teachers had decided that rather than send representatives to a school management team,

they would all meet and make decisions about their school together. The principal often brought student scores to the group, to help focus decisions about what to do next.

The sense of the whole school as a learning community reinforced a goal held by the Navajo Nation as well as the school. That goal was to increase the number of Navajo teachers by supporting the teacher helpers and teaching assistants — all members of the local Navajo community — to take courses that would lead to a teaching credential. Currently 40 percent of the faculty is Navajo, and several new teachers have come out of this support system. The principal who has now replaced Stropko is Navajo, as well.

Negotiating cultural differences has been part of the learning at the school. One non-Navajo teacher notes, "We've had to learn about ourselves, our different learning styles, and our different ways of handling things — basic differences like whether interrupting is supportive or rude, whether long conversational pauses are seen as time to think." A Navajo teacher adds, "We have to understand our Native American students, and especially we have to understand their code switching and not label them deficient or limited."

When teachers talk together about students, they have learned to appreciate that their Navajo and Anglo perspectives may be different but that their goals for the students are the same. "Teamwork" comes up a lot when teachers describe the highlights of their Ganado experience.

When Ganado Intermediate received a National Award for Model Professional Development, the effectiveness of their teamwork was recognized. "That was major," says Lucinda Swedburg, a former Ganado teacher who is the new principal. "We proudly display it, on everything. I just wish the words said, 'For Student Achievement,' because that's why we did it in this building."

H.D. Hilley Elementary School

693 N. Rio Vista Road
El Paso, TX 79927
915-860-3770

Grades: K-5

Number of Students: 690

Student Ethnicity:

89% Latino
11% White
1% African American

English Language Learners: 24%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 70%

Special Needs: 9%

Measures of Success:

- 1997 Texas Successful School
- increased state assessment scores

"We all know what everyone else is doing."

When principal Ivonne Durant first arrived at H.D. Hilley Elementary School, she and the staff decided to upset some stereotypes about who can learn. The state test scores said Hilley students couldn't. But instead of making excuses for their students, whose homes are among the cotton fields of rural Texas and whose demographics as poor and Latino often add up to school failure, the school got focused. Several teachers left. And now everyone knows what the goals are and what is expected — for staff and students.

After only two years, Hilley was chosen by the Texas Education Agency as a "Texas Successful School," in recognition of the impressive progress students were making.

"We are motivated by each other," says a teacher who appreciates the transition the school has been able to make. "Before, I was doing my own writing program, my own reading program. Now I am doing what the whole school is doing. It is easier for the teachers. We all know what everyone else is doing. Now we are more directed."

This direction comes from many levels. An evaluator meets with the staff at the beginning of the year to help them analyze their students' needs and decide how to meet them. Teachers and administrators are aware throughout the year of how well they are meeting their goals. "We all give ourselves pressure," says one teacher. "We tell each other what we expect." At the end of the year, everyone sits down again to analyze what the state test scores tell them about where they can improve.

In addition to the leadership of the School Improvement Team of parents, community members, teachers, and administrators, Hilley's vertical teams, which include teacher representatives from each grade level, coordinate learning in key content areas. Teams for communications, mathematics and

science, fine arts, and technology (which has now been integrated into the other three areas) meet with the principal for a half day every other month, making recommendations for whole-school professional development. "I like the way we break into the vertical teams," says one teacher. "We become specialists in that area. It makes you want to stay abreast, keep up."

The vertical teams also cross-fertilize the horizontal, grade-level teams, which meet for an hour each week. As a first-grade teacher reports, "In our grade levels we get together every single week and strategize what is working and not working." Minutes from their meetings keep the principal informed of particular issues that come up, and she is a frequent observer in classrooms, noting how teachers use what they are learning.

The assistant principal and literacy mentor are additional resources to teachers, observing, providing demonstration lessons, debriefing with them, and participating in the informal learning that is pervasive in the building. As the mentor points out, "We do a lot of sharing. We make the time, even if it is just a short moment walking down the hall, even in the bathrooms. We e-mail each other. If you find an article that is related to what someone else is doing, you put it in their box. I have books in my room that are borrowed from everyone. We are constantly aware of what everyone is doing."

Technology has been a major push at Hilley, with the school's participation in the district Technology Innovation Challenge Grant from the U.S. Department of Education providing computers and training for the school. Teachers really do e-mail each other. And students, from first grade on up, use computers for anything from word processing to HyperStudio presentations. Parents have also been encouraged to learn and teach each other how to use the new technology. Computers are always available to them in the school's Parent Center.

Finally, collaboration and alliances with partner organizations are a feature of Hilley staff's continuous learning. Through partnerships arranged by the Socorro School District, teachers at Hilley can study for tuition-free Master's degrees, enroll in a two-year technology specialty, take advantage of mentors funded by the National Science Foundation, and benefit from the revamped teacher education program at the University of Texas at El Paso. University student teachers and education school faculty are a regular source of new ideas for the school. As principal Durant reports, "The role of the university is huge, huge. Both

for degrees and for our training. They are a key ingredient of our professional development." All of this has translated into improved academic achievement for the Hilley students, students that Durant and her staff members proudly refer to as *mijos* and *mijas*.

Hungerford School

P.S. 721R
155 Tompkins Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10304
718-273-8622

Grades: 12 to 21 years old

Number of Students: 250

Student Ethnicity:

- 59% White
- 20% African American
- 15% Latino
- 6% Asian

English Language Learners: 14%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 67%

Special Needs: 100%

Measures of Success:

- more students use technology
- increased job placements
- more students achieve IEPs
- more students included in general education

"People are encouraged to run with their strengths."

Any morning before school, the parking lot outside Hungerford School provides a dramatic introduction to this remarkable place. Students arrive by ambulances, handicap-equipped buses and vans, and private cars. Nurses and physical therapists join the teachers and paraprofessionals who make their way inside to serve Hungerford's special needs students, many of whom are classified as medically fragile and severely to

profoundly retarded. While a number of students enter the building in wheelchairs, on crutches, or on gurneys, 100 of the 250 12- to 21-year-old students will soon be on their way to work-study placements at businesses and agencies around their Staten Island community.

At Hungerford, these special students have attracted a special staff. Faculty turnover is low, but when new teachers are hired, they often have previously been paraprofessionals in the school. Staff voluntarily give up six Saturdays a year to learn about topics of their choosing, from CPR, to new educational technology, to special arts programming. The Saturday atmosphere is homey, as teachers' children filter through the school building, free to work on the school computers or watch videos rented by the PTA. Food is provided for everyone, and the men do the cooking. Attendance at these gatherings has grown over the years from under a third to an impressive 80 percent of the staff.

The collegiality reflected in these voluntary sessions is also apparent in teachers' weekly team meetings. Instead of typical faculty meetings, teachers attend meetings of staff committees that function as self-directed professional development teams. The teams focus on technology, literacy, math/science, arts, behavior management, and school-to-work transition, and they establish standards for students in each area.

Each team is free to set its own agenda, tied to goals for students. They may request funds to have experts come in, or conduct their own action research, or create curriculum or alternative assessments appropriate for Hungerford students. One team's action research, for example, found that students in group homes gained more weight than other students. The result was a program to get Hungerford students actively participating in the community gym program where students had been placed for work-study. Another team wrote a successful grant to extend a teacher-developed unit about hydroponics into a three-school Web site where students communicate about what they are learning.

Parents are surveyed as well for ideas about professional development efforts that might help their children, and they are active members of the school-based management team.

Individually, too, teachers participate in a wide variety of professional development opportunities — at the district level, as well as at the school. These range from off-site courses and visits to other schools, to on-site lunchtime meetings with other

teachers and visits to each other's classrooms. "There is a lot of fluidity in the building," reports a 10-year veteran. "Teachers go into each other's classrooms. Every student is everybody's student. We're thinking constantly about preparing our students for life."

Teachers' commitment to their students is documented in the professional development portfolios they keep. No matter how teachers choose to invest their professional development time and energy, the portfolio helps them reflect on everything they are learning and how it relates to the school's overall goals for students. The results include an increase in the number of Hungerford students able to use technology, placed in community-based work sites, achieving their individual educational plan goals, and participating in general education classes.

"Nine years ago," says Principal Mary McInerney, "when the state first called for school-based management, a group of teachers wrote and received a grant to begin learning how to go about it. We met regularly and they took ownership, surveying the rest of the staff about their interests in learning."

Teachers are still in charge of their own learning at Hungerford. They participate annually in discussions about where to focus, and the professional development budget is open to everyone. "We haven't had to turn down any requests yet," McInerney notes.

This openness and flexibility on the part of the principal pays off for Hungerford faculty and their students. As one long-time teacher observes, "There is lots of communication. Our principal knows her people, knows their strengths. Two weeks ago I got notice of a grant I wanted to apply for. She got me the support I need to write a grant proposal for the school. She encourages people to run with their strengths."

International High School at LaGuardia Community College

31-10 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101
718-482-5482
Grades: 9-12
Number of Students: 450
Student Ethnicity:
45% Latino
30% Asian
22% White
2% African American
English Language Learners: 73%* (37 different languages)
Free/Reduced Lunch: 82%
Special Needs: 0%
Measures of Success: • increased graduation rates • increased attendance rates • increased college acceptance rates • narrowed ELL achievement gap

*100% of students are admitted as English Language Learners.

"With this level of decision-making power, we have very, very few excuses for not doing the job."

Students can only be admitted to International High School in the New York City district if their English language skills are in the bottom 20 percent citywide and they have been in this country for fewer than four years. It is an admissions test that most students in New York might wish they could pass. At International, students beat the district average in course pass rates, four-year graduation rates, and retention rates (only 1.7 percent drop out of high school, compared with 16.4 percent districtwide). Over 90 percent of International graduates are accepted into college.

Several years ago, the teachers at International found students' limited English language ability to be a persuasive reason to organize the school into small teams and to organize the curriculum for interdisciplinary depth. "A couple of experimental teams were formed," one teacher explains, "and their students were getting better results, doing more sophisticated work. As a school, we decided, okay, this is the way we're going to go."

Now, six teams of six teachers each have extraordinary authority to manage the education of their particular 75 students for the year. "I'm amazed at how much power is given to teams to make decisions," says a teacher who came to International after 17 years in other schools. Another teacher points out the corollary, "It's wonderful," she says, "but you see the problem — there are no excuses. With this level of decision-making power, we have very, very few excuses for not doing the job."

"The job" that teachers do begins not in their classrooms, but in their teams.

Each team meets three hours a week, to develop and revise their interdisciplinary curriculum, share successful practices and troubleshoot problems, allocate a team budget, hire and mentor new teachers for the team, and discuss, or case manage, individual students.

If students are having trouble, International does not have a dean's office to send them to. Kids belong to the team. A third-year teacher explains, "We all see the same kids, and when there's a problem with a kid, it's everybody's problem. You can imagine, especially for a new teacher, how wonderful that is. Case management is a great way to make sure kids don't fall through the cracks."

Teachers don't fall through the cracks either. In addition to the support of team members, new teachers often find themselves team teaching their first year. A new teacher reports, "Things that it takes years and years of teaching to do well, I learned from watching my master teacher and from her feedback."

Additional support, in the form of peer evaluation, occurs annually for teachers' first two years at International and then every third year. "It is an opportunity for us to showcase what we're doing, to ask for help solving problems, and to find out what other teachers are doing," says one teacher. "All that opening up and talking to other people has dramatically changed how I teach," adds another teacher who had felt isolated in other schools.

Teachers also write self-evaluations and create professional portfolios. According to a teacher in her sixth year of teaching, "It gives me a chance to synthesize what I've done, put it together in a coherent way, and focus on my next goals."

When the staff saw how powerful portfolios were for their own learning, the teams started to move away from student tests toward having students show their work to each other and discuss it. Monthly staff meetings, as well as team meetings, have focused on how to institute graduation projects or portfolios. This has meant creating and aligning rubrics with the state standards and graduation requirements. It has also meant supporting students in every class so that by the time they are seniors, they're each prepared to create a successful portfolio.

Teachers, who personally advise several seniors apiece, acknowledge how much work implementing the portfolio process has been, but also how valuable it is, for teachers as well as students. Says one teacher, "I can't overemphasize how important this has been and how much we learn from it."

"The key to school reform is learning," says principal Eric Nadelstern. "All new learning creates change. If your goal for students is to show that education can transform your life, you must have a school culture that demonstrates that adults are capable of learning. We model a structure where teachers can learn."

Samuel W. Mason Elementary School

150 Norfolk Avenue
Roxbury, MA 02119
617-635-8405

Grades: K-5

Number of Students: 300

Student Ethnicity:

71% African American
14% White
11% Latino
2% Asian
2% Native American

English Language Learners: 23%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 74%

Special Needs: 26%

Measures of Success:

- doubled enrollment
- went from 79th most-chosen to 12th most-chosen school in district
- almost doubled districtwide test score gains

"This school's professional development began with the inclusion children."

Before a new principal arrived in 1990, the Boston School District was ready to shut Samuel W. Mason Elementary School down and lock the doors. Of the 79 elementary schools in the district, parents chose "The Mason," as it is called, dead last.

"With that sense of urgency," former principal Mary Russo explains, "we had to take a tough look at our school." The

school's Roxbury neighborhood was itself a tough one, but that wasn't going to change. What had to change was that reading scores were in the lowest quartile in the district and that teachers were operating in total isolation.

Starting essentially from scratch, the school community needed a vision for the school. Parents were asked, "What kind of school do you want your kids to go to?" Teachers were asked, "What kind of school would you want *your* kids to go to? And the kids were asked, "What would a good school look like to you?"

The next question was how to provide the resources to make the changes everyone agreed were needed. One key decision was to become a total inclusion school. This meant the special education teachers and paraprofessionals would be resources for the whole school. Classroom teachers would absorb the special education students, but there would be more teachers to go around. (The school later became a professional development site for the special education program at Wheelock College, with Wheelock students augmenting the school's contingent of paraprofessionals.)

Total inclusion also made it dramatically clear that the whole school would have to think about educating children in a different way. In one teacher's opinion, "This school's professional development began with the inclusion children. To have special needs kids in your class, to have a diverse range of achievement levels in your room, you have to be a more careful observer, and you have to be a better problem solver about your methods."

Another teacher concurs: "I've been teaching for 32 years, and education has changed so much. In the past if Johnny didn't learn it was Johnny's problem. But now, if he didn't learn, there's something you're not doing. I think special education has done a lot to clarify our views on education in general — it's up to us to find optimal conditions for a child to learn."

This change in attitude about responsibility for children's learning was reinforced through the school's decisions to become one of the Boston district's first school-based management sites and to join the Accelerated Schools Network. The district provided a "change coach" and Accelerated Schools delivered the message that not only can all children learn, but children who are behind can learn enough to catch up.

The Mason also needed to find a literacy program that would pull everyone together. "It was always isolated pockets for years," one teacher explains. "There was no syllabus, no dialogue

about when to teach what, no common language or goals."

After investigating and visiting various programs, the School-Based Management Team recommended Early Literacy Learning Initiative (ELLI). Parents and faculty then took a hard look at it, finally agreeing to implement it. Teachers credit much of their learning to ELLI and the fact that a Mason teacher is an on-site, half-time demonstration teacher and coach in the program.

Teachers are also free to visit and coach each other since the school's paraprofessionals, student teachers, and parent volunteers can step in to cover for them. "We have the mentality that you learn from seeing others," reports one teacher. "If someone says they tried something and it went really well, we'll all say, 'Can we see it?'"

Under new principal Jane Palmer Owens, many professional development activities at The Mason are built into the school day. Classes don't start until 9:20, which means that some kind of professional development is going on every morning in the building. Grade-level teams meet weekly. Other teams meet with a focus on literacy or math or site-based management. And a Student Support Team meets twice a month to keep close track of kids who are having trouble or could benefit from special services.

In addition to the schoolwide goals for professional development, teachers have personal goals that they discuss twice a year with the principal. The Mason teachers now average 50 hours of professional development each, up from 6 hours in 1991.

As for student learning, the fact that all professional development is tightly aligned with student assessments has paid off. Twice a month, grade-level teams meet to go over student work. Three times a year, teachers formally assess their students and make presentations to the faculty and parents. And, of course, there are the standardized tests required by the district. On recent tests of reading, math, and writing, The Mason students outperformed the district average in every case, posting gains that have made their school one of the 12 most desirable in Boston, as determined by the parents who vote every day to send their children there.

Montview Elementary School

2055 Moline Street

Aurora, CO 80010

303-364-8549

Grades: K-5

Number of Students: 860

Student Ethnicity:

46% Latino

27% African American

21% White

5% Asian

1% Native American

English Language Learners: 42%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 77%

Special Needs: 13%

Student Transiency: 126%

Measures of Success:

- increased reading and math scores from below to above district average
- virtually eliminated ethnicity performance gaps
- selected as Literacy Learning Network demonstration site

"We can articulate why we're doing what we're doing."

As the student population at Montview shifted from suburban to urban, as the number of English language learners skyrocketed, and as the transiency rate topped 100%, the staff made a choice — to focus on how children learn, to equip themselves with research-based teaching strategies, and to embed professional development in the day-to-day life of the school. Some teachers transferred out when the demands became clear, but others transferred in. "In the years before I came to Montview, I was a so-so teacher, but it was important for me to continually develop. I made a choice to come here because of the professional development, and I've never felt so supported."

Rather than perseverate on their students as "at-risk" learners, the staff decided to clarify their beliefs about learning, and then apply them. They began by choosing an established staff development program, the Literacy Learning Network, to implement schoolwide.

The structure set up five years ago to support that implementation is still in place. Title I funds are used to release selected staff members from classroom duties so that they can function as coaches, or "teacher leaders," for other staff. Each leader has a group of teachers he or she observes once a week. The leader then meets individually with each one to discuss the observation and to help the teacher update or make adjustments to his or her personal action plan.

In addition to the concrete, classroom-specific learning promoted through these coaching relationships, nearly all the staff attend Wednesday "dialogue" sessions to bring research resources and professional articles to bear on schoolwide learning

issues. Teachers earn district credit for attending these voluntary after-school sessions, participate in preparing the agendas, and facilitate the dialogue.

According to teachers, this model works because they think of themselves as learners in the same way they think about their students as learners — as being on a continuum, always ready to take the next step. They are all expected to generate questions about what they are doing, what they are learning, and what they would like to try or find out.

"My action plans," explains a third-year teacher, "began the first year looking at the literacy model, since I was not familiar with it. Then my coach would suggest things and I was able to deepen those understandings. Now, this year, I am directed by my own questions, things I wonder about from talking with other staff members or my grade level."

Relatively new teachers aren't the only ones who thrive in this atmosphere. As a veteran teacher points out, "Because each of us works on an individualized action plan, which is very relevant and very real, it is hard to get burned out. You are always being challenged by some kind of new learning. It would be hard to get stuck in a rut."

Principal Debbie Backus would agree that she, too, is learning a lot. "The heart of all we're doing here," she says, "is developing theories to support our practice." One way Backus builds her professional understanding is through the Wednesday dialogue sessions. As one teacher observes, "I really respect the fact that she comes to our dialogues. She's so professional we want to attend." Adds another teacher, "She understands what an instructional leader does. She is a learner just like every single teacher. She works on action plans. She had to learn herself how kids learn. She is always working on something new."

"Originally," Backus reports, "professional development came from the teacher evaluation process, but when we started letting student assessment drive instruction, using data about our kids, it changed our professional development orientation to understanding the learner, to really understanding what do you know about the student.

"Our professional development is job-embedded, focused on real problems and real issues, with teachers feeling they have strategies, ways to deal with why a kid is learning or not learning. Talk in this school is professional. We can articulate why we're doing what we're doing."

What Montview staff are doing has paid off for students in both reading and math. Students' scores on standardized

tests moved from below the district average to the top of the district range. In addition, teachers have been able to virtually eliminate ethnic performance gaps. But as one teacher describes success, "I'm successful when I open the door and 99 percent of the kids show up, even when the weather is crummy, even when they don't feel well, because they want to be there."

Shallowford Falls Elementary School

3529 Lassiter Road
Marietta, GA 30062
770-640-4815

Grades: K-5

Number of Students: 660

Student Ethnicity:

- 90% White
- 3% African American
- 3% Latino
- 3% Asian

English Language Learners: 0.5%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 3%

Special Needs: 15%

Measures of Success:

- steadily higher ITBS scores even with baseline scores above district average
- selected as Talents Unlimited demonstration site

"We're all focusing on the same thing. Nothing comes out of left field somewhere."

In 1990, Shallowford Falls Elementary was a brand new school, built to serve a prosperous Atlanta suburb. Parents' expectations were high, but they couldn't have imagined that the principal's and teachers' expectations were even higher. Principal Cheryl Hunt Clements interviewed 250 teachers before selecting her staff, and she made it clear what the demands would be. As one teacher puts it, "You've got to be willing to give 112 percent. From the moment we got here, Cheryl expressed the idea that everyone would be a team player."

Over the years, through site-based management, teachers have decided to focus that 112 percent on improving students' scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) — in a school where students already score well above the district average. "It's such a big job," one teacher explains, "that you can't do it alone. We have to think of ourselves as a team."

As evidence of this team approach, no matter what students' test percentiles are in first and second grade, by fifth grade they're higher. The gains are cumulative across the grades. In fact, Shallowford Falls fifth graders are consistently the highest in the district.

Each spring, a cross-grade team analyzes the new ITBS scores to draft the School Improvement Plan and associated professional development plan for the year ahead. Those plans are shared with the whole staff, reviewed by the principal, and reviewed again by the staff. "It's bottom up and then comes back down and we refine it," says one teacher. "In the end, it's mandatory, but we're all focusing on the same thing. Nothing comes out of left field somewhere."

In addition to the schoolwide goals, grade-level teams and individual teachers also have score-driven goals. The principal sees her role in helping teachers use their test data as crucial to the process. "Every year," she explains, "we rank ourselves by each sub-test against each of the 61 elementary schools in the district. Each grade level identifies its strengths and weaknesses." For example, one year the student gains for the whole fourth grade were low in listening skills, so improving the teaching of listening skills became a focus for that team.

Grade-level teams are given release time three times a year to analyze their students' strengths and weaknesses. They also meet after school one Thursday a month, and they get together informally at lunch or whenever they need help or want to share a success. A veteran teacher explains, "The greatest resource you have is the teacher next door. That's really practiced here." Another teacher cites the example of the first year she taught third grade: "My scores were the lowest in third grade, so I went to the teacher that had the highest scores. The next year I copied what she did, and my class scores came up."

Teachers analyze their own weaknesses and write personal goals that are shared with their grade-level team and the principal — not as mea culpas but for support. As one teacher unabashedly reveals, "What I need to beef up this year is more language and punctuation. Ten of my kids went down, so that's a personal thing I can improve on to help the kids. I assumed they knew more than they did. But something got missed."

Teachers also develop goals for each student, which they go over with the principal. The principal explains, "We develop a profile sheet for each student, over time, from grade to grade, and it specifies for each child how much to push. At the end of the year we also look at each child's gain scores and try to figure out, if any child did exceptionally well, why, and if a child didn't do well, why. That information is passed on to the child's next teacher."

All this focus is relentless. Says one teacher, "We put the kids under a microscope, but they can tell you how much their personal score has gone up, and they can see their growth."

After school, the focus widens and students have a wide range of activities such as art, drama, Spanish, and running clubs to help them develop more broadly.

Parents at Shallowford Falls are highly involved in their children's school experience. Between 90 and 100 percent of them turn out for the many events planned for parents, and they also show up to help out. "The involvement of parents," one teacher points out, "has been a huge part of our success. As teachers, we learn and do our thing, and the kids need to do their thing, too. Homework and class work are not optional. The parents know that and they are supportive."

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School

312 N. Juliette Avenue
Manhattan, KS 66502
913-587-2170

Grades: K-6

Number of Students: 320

Student Ethnicity:

80% White
15% African American
3% Asian
1% Latino
1% Native American

English Language Learners: 1%

Free/Reduced Lunch: 44%

Special Needs: 30%

Measures of Success:

- increased student performance in math
- increased student performance in science
- increased student performance in reading and language arts

"One of the things we have going for us is that each staff development builds on the last one. They all fit together."

Woodrow Wilson Elementary School and its mostly veteran faculty members had a long association with Kansas State University well before the new state math assessments left their students high and dry. That connection continues now that the school and university have restructured professional development so that not only math, but

also reading, writing, and science scores have shot up.

"It goes back to the '80s," reports a teacher who's been there long enough to know. During that time many Wilson teachers took courses at the university and participated in university projects and summer programs. One of those projects was to help the university restructure its program for preservice teachers. "It was very motivating," says this same longtime Wilson teacher, "going to the university, meeting with educators at that level, and being empowered to be experts."

Following the evolution of the university's preservice program, Wilson was tapped to become one of its professional development schools, and the association with KSU deepened. As another Wilson veteran observes, "Being a PDS school provides us with a lot of opportunities — to take classes for credit or stipends, to go to workshops, to participate in grants." But it wasn't until she and two of her colleagues took an action-research course, that the university-school relationship really took off.

The "course" coincided with the embarrassing math problem-solving scores for Wilson students, and it led to a new approach to professional development for the whole school. "Those three [teachers] focused us in," acknowledges one of their colleagues. "They were in the math area, looking at the state assessment, and they identified some areas where our kids needed to improve. They were the pioneers."

Originally, the principal gave up two faculty meetings a month for the whole staff to participate in the math action-research effort. Teachers took the math assessment themselves, figured out what their kids were going to need to know, wrote practice math problems for students to work with, and scored and analyzed real student responses to real test items. "I don't think of it as having to teach to the test," one teacher says. "It's caused our teaching to be what it should be."

Teachers still meet twice a month, in addition to their district staff development days. The focus for these meetings, which are faculty-led, is decided at the beginning of the year by a faculty committee in response to colleagues' suggestions and student needs. As one teacher explains, "Now all these things are in the fire, inservice-wise. People say, 'Maybe we need that kind of emphasis in reading or social studies.' The whole staff is infected."

But it is the *structure* of the professional development, more than any particular content area, that really seems to make the difference for Woodrow Wilson

teachers. "Before," a teacher admits, "you could go to an inservice and not really do anything because there was no follow-up. Now we're always back talking within a month because of something we did together. Sometimes I get disorganized, but this kind of inservice drives you, keeps you on course." Another teacher concurs, "One of the things we have going for us is that each staff development builds on the last one. They all fit together."

For one of the few new teachers to join the Wilson faculty, this structure proved especially helpful. "The inservices had a momentum, it was ongoing learning. I just glided in," she says.

In addition to the learning that teachers do with their colleagues, over 50 preservice students are in the building each semester, with about 10 of them doing their student teaching, while the others come in with a specific content-area focus. This level of interaction with teacher candidates makes it easy for even the most jaded of teachers to embody the adage that the best way to learn is to teach.

"We've changed the way we see preservice teachers here," one of the senior staff members explains. "Our teachers don't just turn their class over. We've really pushed the team-teaching, cooperative approach. Our teachers explain what they're doing to the preservice teachers. And while they're doing that, they're thinking through and justifying what they're doing. The preservice teachers are very open, like sponges, about learning. But because they're also in some ways critiquing what they see, the classroom teachers are doing their best job every day."

Despite frequent turnover in the principalship at Wilson, the staff has moved ahead, taking responsibility for its own professional development, working with the university, and implementing a number of curricular and instructional changes to support increased student achievement. Notes one teacher, "We've had a rotation of principals through here. I have to give a lot of credit to the staff."

Appendix B The Research Study

When the U.S. Department of Education contracted with WestEd to conduct a study of eight schools that received department awards for their professional development programs, the first question to answer was *What teacher learning opportunities are available in these schools?* Next, the study asked *How do teachers learn in these schools?* These broad questions naturally suggested other questions: What is the structure of the professional development programs? What human and financial resources support ongoing learning? What are the roles of the principal, teachers, and district? and What is the context in which continuous improvement occurs?

Under contract to WestEd, Joellen Killion of the National Staff Development Council designed and managed a process to answer these and related questions. (The initial research report is available at www.WestEd.org/wested/news.html/.) The first step was to create teacher and principal interview protocols designed to help identify the multiple factors that contributed to success in these schools.

Next, eight researchers were selected for their expertise in professional development and/or evaluation. Team members, regardless of their background, took part in interview training and training in methods of data collection and data analysis.

Then a two-member site team visited each school for two days. During the two days, the site team conducted in-depth interviews with 3 to 6 teachers and the principal. Brief interviews were also conducted with 4 to 13 more teachers. In some cases, to accommodate teachers' schedules, group interviews were held at lunchtime and within team meetings. For two of the three schools that had had new principals since the school was recognized, both the former principal and the current principal were interviewed.

In total, site teams conducted 30 in-depth teacher interviews (60-90 minutes), 64 brief teacher interviews (30 minutes), and 10 principal interviews (60-90 minutes) between mid-May and late June 1999. Despite hectic schedules at the end of the school year, teachers, students, principals, and

support staff graciously welcomed the researchers and eagerly shared their stories.

Data collected by each team were analyzed and compiled using a domain analysis process, which allowed the researchers to group similar data from the different schools and to characterize factors that appeared to be important across the eight schools' diverse settings and circumstances.

Analysis of these factors was the major reason for conducting this study. But interview data can yield much more. Data from interviews were also used to develop a number of vignettes and the site profiles in Appendix A. In addition, direct quotes from teachers and principals have been included generously in this report to convey the very real energy and effort behind the data.

Many, many teachers were interviewed, more than were necessary simply to "get the story." What we also wanted this report to reflect was what happened for *most* teachers in these schools, to represent the voice of "every teacher." This is not to say that these are "ordinary" teachers. They are all, in fact, extraordinary. They worked outside their comfort zones. They came together and made decisions to influence the direction of the entire school. They set aside their personal interests for the benefit of their students, working hard and long. They supported and coached one another in a community of learners. And they demanded the best of themselves and their colleagues. Their individual views and collective experience can instruct us all.

"Compelling. The story of these exemplary schools is presented so tl others can learn from it. This book helps to realize our goals for the National Awards Program for Model Professional Development."

– Terry Dozier, Special Advisor on Teaching, U.S. Department of Educatio

Teachers Who Learn, Kids Who Achieve is about what it takes to translate professional development into impressive learning gains for kids. The experiences of eight award-winning schools are distilled into crisp principles for success. Teacher voices and vignettes add on-the-ground reality. And annotated lists of resources provide practical help.

Voices from *Teachers Who Learn, Kids Who Achieve*

"Teachers had me working hard [as a new principal] correcting things that were wrong…but by Christmas their list was getting shorter. By February we were ready to say, 'What's the next step in getting this school to be the best in the state.'"

— Intermediate School Principal

"We all give ourselves pressure. We tell each other what we expect."

— Elementary School Teacher

"I've been teaching for 32 years…. In the past if Johnny didn't learn, it was Johnny's problem. But now, if he didn't learn, there's something you're not doing…. It's up to us."

— Elementary School Teacher

"With this level of decision-making power, we have very, very few excuses for not doing the job."

— High School Teacher

"I made a choice to come [to this school] because of the professional development. I've never felt so supported."

— Elementary School Teacher

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